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REPUBLICAN CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: REFLECTIONS OF A MEANER, TOUGHER AMERICA

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REPUBLICAN CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: REFLECTIONS OF A MEANER, TOUGHER AMERICA

ABSTRACT

This essay examines some Republican communication behaviors which account in part for accusations that the use of negative strategies was unprecedented during the 1988 presidential campaign. It also explores some of the effects of those strategies on political communication behavior during the first year of the Bush Administration. It is suggested that a kind of systemic demagoguery may have produced Campaign '88 and its legacy. Parts of that system include the process, the polls, the packagers, the press and the public. The paper concludes with some suggestions for modifying the campaign system to discourage demagogic communication.

> This is American politics in the era of the perpetual negative campaign; ruthless, paranoid and essentially issue-free (Morganthau, "Dirtball...", p. 32).

"Dirty" politics has been around long before the advent of unethical television spots (Trent and Friedenberg, p. 310). However, post-Campaign '88 rumor has it that things are getting worse. Germond and Witcover believe that between 1960 and 1988 the process of nominating presidential candidates has so radically altered as to be "almost recognizable" (p. 49). They observe that not only was the political culture of 1988 vastly different but much harsher, run by "hired guns" rather than "old friends in the party" and shaped by technique rather than issue (p. 61). Denton too argues American politics is a different entity today than even twenty years ago. Rules, instruments of public communication and especially electorate involvement have produced citizens as viewers rather than participants, reactors rather than responders and endorses rather than innovators ("Product...", p. 1).

There are some who believe the tactics used by George Bush and his Republican team to win in 1988 are themselves unprecedented even in this era of unprecedented negative campaigning:

> The plain fact was that from the outset George Bush ran a campaign distinguished by a degree of negativism and intensity that had never been seen in presidential politics in the television age--a campaign that appealed to the lowest common denominator in the electorate (Germond and Witcover, p. 413).

Representative Jim Leach, a Republican moderate and long time Bush ally criticizes the President's failure at creating a "kinder and gentler" America at least in terms of political behavior. Leach complains of a "politics of innuendo" and the "poisoning of standards that assassinates; rather than holds accountable, character" (cited in Weinraub, p. B11).

This essay examines some Republican political communication behaviors that might have accounted for some of the above assessments both in terms of Campaign '88 and Bush Administration strategies. It concludes with a brief discussion and consideration of the impact of such behavior on future American political activity.

The Candidate

Media consultant and chief Republican campaign pollster Robert Teeter recalled that from the beginning, the election staff realized

> we had to control the agenda. We wanted to maximize the difference between the two candidates, make Bush and Dukakis as different as possible, as far apart and raise Dukakis' negatives (cited in Germond and Witcover, p. 40l).

Thus it is not really surprising that rhetoric virtually guaranteed to create negative images frequented George Bush's public discourse during Campaign '88. Defining demagoguery as the oversimplification of inflammatory issues and exploitation of prejudices, one political analyst questioned "if what Bush and Quayle have been doing these past weeks does not fit the definition, then what does?" (Collins).

Fisher, arguing the demagogue--a popular leader without ethical standards--is an ever present danger to democracy, provides a framework for determining demagogic discourse. At least some of the Republican strategies in Campaign '88 may be determined through an examination of George Bushs' rhetoric according to these pre-requisites: a perceived crisis, a devil cause, a simple solution, basic virtues and ritualization (Fisher, pp. 107-ll).

Initially, demagogic appeal hinges on taking advantage of audience fears(Fisher p. 108). Much as McCarthy really did not have to create a crisis in America's minds in the l950s, Bush really did not have much to do in the l980s. Bush's crisis rhetoric revolved primarily around "loosing ground" to anything that threatened the good life including crime: "I'm the one in this race who wants to strengthen law enforcement; my opponent is strongly out of the American mainstream on issues such as fighting crime" (cited in Welch). Bush was particularly effective in creating/identifying the fearful situation of furloughed- criminals preying on innocent victims in his repeated focus on Willie Horton, a black who raped a white woman while on release from a furlough program during Dukakis' Massachusetts governorship ("Democrats Charge Racism...")

Once an audience believes a crisis is pending, a demagogue may take advantage of such perceptions by offering a scapegoat or "devil cause" for that crisis or threat. George Bush labeled the

liberal element of the Democratic party as "them", personified by Michael Dukakis. For example, Dukakis' health care plan became "socialized medicine" and " a prescription for financial disaster" (cited in Hunt, p. A7). Not deterred by a "bunch of liberals" (Toner, "Dukakis Likens...", p. Y8) Bush's mission became one of protecting Americans from those who labeled themselves with "the big 'L' word", particularly Dukakis (cited in Boyd). Bush's rhetoric included deliberate factual mispresentation of Dukakis' positions regarding the Pledge of Allegiance and the furlough program as well as direct charges that the Democrat was unpatriotic, at best "just this side of subversive" and at worst, "someone who might deliberately pave the way for a Soviet takeover" ("Dukakis For..." p. A6).

A third element in Fisher's framework is an attractive, easily applied and immediately workable solution. Dukakis accused Bush of offering only "the easy way" to solve problems (cited in Espo, "Bush, Dukakis Trade..." p.A2) and another critic argued the Republican candidate strategically "shunned substantive dialogue with the press and the American people in favor of carefully managed visual events" ("Debate Worth..."). Kaus and Clift suggest that Bush purposely avoided offering concrete solutions so that he would be "free to paint his new l988 persona on a blank canvas" and not have to be held accountable to previous positions on issues (p. 25).

Demagogic rhetoric usually includes public appeals to "incredible" patriotism and "virtue in every form" (Fisher, p. II0). Patriotism in the form of appeals to the American flag, the Pledge of Allegiance and Dukakis' suspicious ACLU leanings permeated Bush's discourse. Often such appeals were presented during carefully staged sessions surrounded by American flags, the bigger the better ("Dowd, "With Flag..."). Particularly in the South and West, Bush painted Dukakis as a "liberal card-carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union, from 'Taxachusetts'" who wanted to disarm citizens, keep children from their Pledge to their flag and "free murderers too" (cited in Peterson).

A final demagogic strategy is ritualizing appeals to block rational thought. Devices such as slogans and catch-phrases become "actively anti-intellectual" and drown out reasoning (Fisher, p. III). One of Bush's most effective ritualizing devices was the combined one-message-per-day and "sound bite" strategy orchestrated by his handlers. As a result, a telescoped form of politics was practiced with a daily sprinkling into campaign texts of made-for-television bites designed to place Dukakis on the

defensive. Bush one-liners included "read my lips: no new taxes" (Hackett); " a kinder, gentler America" (Peterson); "if you believe that, he's got some bottled water from Boston harbor he'd like to sell you" (Espo, "Bush, Dukakis Praise..."): "Dukakis thinks a naval exercise is something you find in a Jane Fonda workout book" (Shapiro, "The Phantom Race...", p. 18); referring to Dukakis as the"furlough king" (Dowd, "Bush Portrays...", P. Y6) and a card carrying member of the ACLU" (Kramer, p. 17).

The Handlers

Despite what some might construe as unethical campaigning, Bush argued that he was "strongly opposed" to campaigning negatively by bringing up race, religion, family or background or by "indulging in innuendo or gossip." However, he did "think it is proper to bring out issues that properly position a candidate on his record" (cited in Germond and Witcover, p. 467). Paul Simon, however, believes that the general election "went wrong" because Bush "went wrong" through his participation and endorsement of methods which enabled him to win, but only because he used processes which "demeaned the presidency." That Bush's campaign was from its inception exactly the kind he argued against became clear, in Simon's view, when "I learned that Roger Ailes served as his media expert":

> Ailes is the crown prince of negative campaigning. But I did not anticipate how bad it would get. Lee Atwater, a specialist in alley fights, joined his negative campaigning skills with those of Ailes (p. 153).

Germond and Witcover contend that through the media expertise of the Republican election team "Gang of Six" (p. 74) ramrodded by Ailes and Atwater, manipulation of public opinion became the substitute for leadership and advocacy. During the Bush campaign, "consultants had become wizards of the business" and "surrogates for the candidate" (Germond and Witcover, p. 49).

Lee Atwater's theme and method were one: what counts in not how you play the game; it's whether you win or not" (Reeves, p. B2). Lewis recalls a time in 1980 when a Democratic candidate for Congress said Atwater had planted questions with reporters about the fact that the candidate had electric shock therapy and when questioned by the press, Atwater replied he would not answer charges by someone who had been "hooked up to jumper cables".

Such past behavior hinted at what was to follow when Atwater led the Republican assault as George Bush's campaign manager almost a decade later. As early as 1981, Atwater was using the phrase "permanent campaign" to describe his plans for mobilization of an ongoing political network (McLaughlin). With a principle theory of "robbing the other guy's base" (Borger, p. 18) his principle technique was to attack and his goal to accentuate the negative and define Democrats better than they could define themselves (Walsh, p. 31). Referred to as a "political Genghis Khan" (Apple) with a "well-developed reputation for political hardball" (Barnes, "Republican...") Reeves suggests Atwater is the "little Atilla of his day" and observed

> in every campaign he manages, rumors begin to pop up about mental illness, homosexuality, drugs, and the burning of American flags by opponents' wives (p. B1).

Typical of Lee Atwater's strategy was the Willie Horton revolving-prison-door ad. In Atwater's view, charges that his team was trying to use a black man to plant fear of Michael Dukakis in whites (Hendrickson) were unfounded. Rather, the Horton case for Atwater became only a campaign tool, a strategy and "one of those gut issues that are values issues" and especially in the South, "if we hammer at these over and over, we are going to win" (Rosenthal, "Foes...").

Overall, in the Atwater/Ailes management team, issues were virtually irrelevant. Some attention was paid defense and foreign policy but generally the rest was "a wasteland" (Barnes, "Cheap..."). Issues relevant to national import such as the economy, homelessness and international trade were crowded out by issues like prison furloughs (Germond and Witcover, p. 8).

The Republican handlers also condoned and encouraged false rumor and ridicule as standards in campaign rhetoric. Atwater spread the rumor that Dukakis had "seen a shrink" (Rosenthal, "The Manipulators") and thought Dukakis' M-1 tank ride wearing a helmet at a General Dynamics plant was "the biggest bonanza I had seen in the whole campaign":

> I could immediately think of three analogies that everybody could relate to and laugh their ass off at--Rocky the Squirrel, Beetle Bailey and Alfred E. Neuman. It was a gold mine" (cited in Germond and Witcover, (p. 407).

Roger Ailes was especially attuned to the fact that producing and delivering negative but visually powerful ads focusing on Dukakis' mistakes was a sure way to guarantee a "free hit" because the news primarily was interested in pictures and mistakes. In Ailes words:

> If pretty visuals and harsh words were the only thing the media would publish, screw 'em. Give it to 'em every night (cited in Yepsen, p. 10).

Essentially, the Republican handlers created an "all but scripted" campaign (Barnes, "Cheap...") mandating that Bush avoid participation in free exchanges of ideas unless absolutely unavoidable. Specious or not, the strategies of the "Gang of Six" worked and their man became president.

The Aftermath

What lurks over the horizon as a result of the success of Campaign '88 for the Republicans? George Bush. And Lee Atwater, a self-proclaimed "thirty year-guy" who plans to "stay in the game a long, long time" initially as the newly appointed Republican National Committee Chair (McLaughlin). Included in his battle plans: a GOP coalition within the next decade (Borger, p. 18) with a political base that will send a Republican to the White House through the beginning of the twenty-first century (McDonald,p. 34) and a permanent campaign to augment Bush's odds with the Democratic congress (McLaughlin).

Germond and Witcover suggest that early in his Administration, Bush "underwent a remarkable transition" in that he realized the "need to cleanse the air that has poisoned the political atmosphere throughout the presidential campaign of 1988" but that most of his campaign staff of experienced political combat veterans had been "warehoused" for the next presidential or Republican campaign war (pp. 456-7). Simon observes the danger that someone who abuses the process to achieve public office may abuse the process while in office (p. 154). Recent events in the Bush/Atwater administration seem to indicate the next war has begun and that a kinder and gentler political America still eludes the electorate. In the words of one observer:

> The Atwater methods have Congress in a paralyzing state of fear and anger right now. No one knows who may be the next victim of innuendo (Lewis).

Wounds such as those inflicted through the attack agenda set by the Republicans in Campaign '88 will take a long time to heal. In fact, there is some evidence of not only a long recovery, but a perhaps indefinite convalescence.

President Bush may have begun his tenure on themes of bipartisanship, ethics and integrity and cooperation with the Democratically controlled Congress. However, three issues and the resulting partisan battles still argue for a "meaner, tougher" rather than a "kinder, gentler" political America: 1. the Tower confirmation hearings followed by the investigation of Speaker Wright; 2. the Supreme Court's decision on abortion in the Webster v. Reproductive Services case, and 3. the Supreme Court's decision in the flag burning case of Texas v. Jackson.

The Tower-Wright "Tit-For-Tat"

The constitutional process of advise and consent and President Bush's emphasis on ethics and integrity provided one of the first tests of bipartisanship and cooperation when the President nominated his long-time friend and political ally former Senator John Tower for Secretary of Defense. Morganthau described the scrutiny to which Tower was subjected as "an orgy of hypocritical puritanism" ("Tower's Troubles," p. 18). In part, Tower's problems stemmed from his work as a highly-paid consultant to several major defense contractors which he would be responsible for working with as Secretary of Defense, and charges that his personal conduct was at best questionable.

It was feared that the more than one million dollars Tower had received from contractors would influence his decisions ("The Case Against John Tower"). Morganthau suggests that the "womanizing and drinking" charges against Tower became news because the White House openly explained what resulted from FBI investigations. During these background checks, President Bush stood by his nominee and defended him in statements such as "I have seen nothing, not one substantiated fact that makes me change my mind about John Tower's ability to be Secretary of defense" (Weinraub, p. B11). Ultimately Senator Nunn's Armed Services Committee ended the protracted confirmation process and partisan in-fighting by rejecting the nomination with a strict party line vote. Morganthau concludes "it was the endless repetition of the words womanizing and drinking that made the committee vote inevitable"

("Tower's Troubles", p. 22).

Validity of charge/counter-charge aside, Tower's confirmation experience was shaped at least in part by the political fallout from Campaign '88. Although Bush's inaugural rhetoric stressed bipartisanship and ethics, the battle over Tower was perhaps a partisan reaction to Dukakis' defeat. Tower's nomination was an easy target to retaliate and challenge Bush's emphasis on ethics. The tactics of personal attack and unsubstantiated charges that characterized George Bush's campaign against Michael Dukakis seemed equally effective in the Democrats' defeat of the Tower nomination.

The Tower hearings were carried out against the backdrop of an ethically embattled democratic Speaker of the House, Jim Wright. Rather than focusing on accountability for personal behavior, charges against Wright centered on the production and sale of a book of his speeches. Following the rejection of the Tower nomination, Toner reports National Republican Congressional Committee Head Ed Rollins "annoyed Democrats" when he chose the House speaker as the "number one target in the l990 election" ("Wright Resigning as Speaker"). Wright resigned as Speaker and later gave up his seat in the House over the charges.

Another round of partisan in-fighting was pending in the charge made by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chair Beryl Anthony that Newt Gingrich, like Wright, had improperly used a book to raise campaign funds. Anthony defended his failure to file formal charges with the House Ethics Committee by arguing he hoped to avoid appearances of partisanship. Gingrich denied the charges and countered by calling Anthony the "P.T. Barnum of sleaze" and accusing him of a "pre-emotive strike" prior to the formal Ethics Committee report on Wright (cited in Toner,"Wright Resigning as Speaker"). Gingrich also threatened "massive retaliation" against "dozens of Democrats" if attacked (Roberts, p. 35).

Toner characterizes the political climate of post-Tower, pre-Wright politics by noting that while Bush extended the "hand of bipartisanship" other Republicans were "lobbing grenades" ("Wright Resigning As Speaker"). A new player on the battlefield was then House majority leaders and soon-to-be Speaker Thomas Foley. Foley expressed his concerns about the infighting through a parable:

> There is a good elephant who wraps his trunk around you and walks through the forest to the high savannas of bi-partisan achievement. But behind is the rumble of the elephant rogue herd--Mr. Atwater and Mr. Rollins and others whose principal purpose is to find Democrats and stomp them to death. Now which elephant are we going to be dealing with? (cited in Toner, "Wright Resigning As Speaker").

Prior to Foley's replacement as Speaker of the House, there was concern that "ethics wars" might go on for months in an "orgy of partisan cannibalism" through a "McCarthy-like terror of escalation denunciation and an exodus of good people from government" (Martz and Adler, p. 19).

Wright's accuser, Gingrich, expressed this potential in chilling McCarthyist rhetoric of unsupported accusation:

> I think this country is going to be further shocked when the news media digs deeper to discover that it doesn't stop with Coelho and Wright, that it goes on to more and more people...at least i think another nine or ten, maybe more than that(Dionne).

For a time, some hoped with the new Speaker's appointment, a bi-partisan coalition government consisting of Foley, George Mitchell as the Democratic leader of the Senate and the President might finally produce a politically gentler nation. This was not to be the case. The same manufacturers of Bush's "kinder America" Campaign '88 theme and Wright's post-election downfall immediately engineered retaliatory attacks against Foley.

Soon after Foley's appointment, RNC staff member Mark Gooden circulated a memo insinuating that the Speaker was a homosexual. Entitled "Tom Foley: Out of the Liberal Closet" the memo compared Foley's record to that of Representative Barney Frank, a declared homosexual(Lewis). Goodin lost his job, Atwater denounced the memo and Bush regarded the insinuation as "disgusting" ("Ethics Update"). The memo failed to remove Foley, but its negative residue remains.

Abortion: Webster v. Reproductive Services

Supreme Court decisions from the summer of 1989 provided new fodder for political in-fighting and the shift in focus from personalities to issues. The Court's decision in Webster v. Reproductive

Services, which gave states wider latitude regarding abortion policies became a major issue on Capital Hill. Early in the first year of his Presidency, Bush's team did not consider the issue particularly crucial but with the Court's July decision, the issue ignored and partisan debate heated-up.

Florida became the first state to address the issue politically when the state legislature defeated Governor Bob Marinez's call for stricter abortion legislation. Similar situations in New Jersey and Virginia reflected the political volatility of the abortion issue. During a November 1989 campaign junket to support the GOP candidates in these states, Bush was careful to avoid the "A" or "abortion" word. Political expediency and perhaps his advisors dictated that whereas the "L" (for liberal) word could effectively work in his presidential bid, the "A" word could only harm GOP gubernatorial candidates ("Abortion and the Political Process").

However, at the federal level, the partisan debate on funding of abortion and abortion in the case of rape and incest accelerated into intense "trench warfare" over Bush's veto of legislation that would have allowed federal funding for women victimized through rape or incest. For example, a major Democratic rhetorical strategy was to label Bush as unfeeling and out of step with the people on the abortion issue. Not surprisingly, the Democratic strategy was modeled after a similar one Bush used successfully against Dukakis regarding issues of patriotism and national defense. Republicans countered charges by saying that the President was not cruel, but "principled" (Toner, "Veto on Abortion"). However, Bush's performance in stumping for GOP candidates suggests such principles may be relative to the political climate of the moment.

While partisanship and emotional displays are perhaps to be expected in the abortion debate, an especially sinister Campaign '88 image shadows the argument. Bush seems haunted by his own creation, the image of Willie Horton. At least one Democrat has used Horton, successfully conjured up to portray Dukakis as weak on crime during Campaign '88, to attack Bush on abortion. During the floor debate, Democrat Steny Hoyer challenged: "Which of us would have stood before her [Horton's victim] and said carry Willie Horton's baby to term?" ("NBC Nightly News", 25 October 1989).

The Flag: Texas v. Johnson

During the 1988 presidential campaign, Bush's team made patriotism a major issue by implying Dukakis' refusal to sign legislation requiring the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance was unpatriotic. This charge, although unfounded (Dukakis refused to sign because of advice from the Massachusetts Supreme Court that the legislation was unconstitutional), remained essentially unchallenged and effectively contributed to Bush's win. The flag and patriotism emerged as a partisan political issue after the Supreme Court ruled that flag burning was a constitutionally protected right of free expression. The Court's over-turning of Gregory Johnson's Texas conviction for burning an American flag in protest of the Reagan administration during the 1984 Republican Convention, immediately provoked calls for either a new Federal law or a constitutional amendment to "protect the flag".

Shortly after Bush's inauguration, one campaign critic observed:

> Those of us who found George Bush's flag-waving presidential campaign a bit nauseating were consoled by the knowledge that it would come to an end. He would impugn Michael Dukakis' patriotism for a few months, tug shamelessly on the nation's heartstrings, and then, come early November, it would all be over, one way or the other. We didn't expect a President Bush to convert demagoguery into legislation, by law, a law mandating respect for the flag. And we still don't ("Waiving the Flag", p. 7).

This comment could not have been more prophetic. Following the Texas v. Johnson decision, Bush called for a constitutional amendment to "protect" the American flag ("House Votes Ban"). To not support such a proposal, or at least legislation, could amount to political suicide in the negatively charged atmosphere of contemporary partisan politics. At any moment, any opponent, Republican or Democrat, could attack a non-supporters' patriotism.

In October the House, not surprisingly, voted overwhelming approval of the Flag Protection Act of 1989, a federal ban on flag burning ("House Votes Ban"). Senate approval soon followed and the legislation was sent to the President.

What had begun initially as predominately Republican flag-waving demagoguery had become law ("TRB from Washington"). In one observer's view, George Bush, not Gregory Johnson, should have been prosecuted for "misappropriating the government's trademark":

> It was Bush not Johnson, who tried to use the flag as a symbol for his political clique rather than the nation as a whole, as if it were a flag only for Republicans. In wrapping himself in the flag, he diminished it as a symbol of our national unity and converted it into an instrument of divisiveness ("Waiving the Flag", p. 8).

These three cases suggest that bi-partisan American politics have become infected by the legacy of Campaign '88.. Lewis believes such cases raise an important question if President Bush really wants bipartisanship:

> His people say he reprimanded Mr. Atwater for the attack on Speaker Foley. But he put Mr. Atwater at the Republican Committee knowing just what the man was, and he is leaving him there. Does he want some governance in this country? Or does he want Atwaterism?

It may be that as long as the Hander/President relationship is so keen and as long, at least, as the Handler is Lee Atwater, "smear" and "foul" will be the operative terms rather than "kinder and gentler" ("Another Republican Smear").

Discussion

Shapiro concludes that substance of Campaign '88 was "what cold pizza is to a balanced breakfast"("Why It Was...", p. 18). The successful agenda setter of that campaign was the Republican camp. The critical dynamic was that the campaign war was being fought on issues raised by the Republican team while the Dukakis team was virtually always on the defensive (Germond and Witcover, p. 405). In Simon's opinion, it was because of Bush's primarily negative but extraordinary successful negative campaign agenda that the nation stumbled into election day with issues obscured and a feeling on the part of the electorate that l988 did not display democracy at its best" (p. 16l).

It should be noted at this point that although the Bush team won the campaign at least in part because of one of the most successfully negative campaigns in recent times, the Dukakis team did not forsake "dirty politics" entirely. Germond and Witcover note that initially Dukakis did not believe Bush's demagogic accusations would be effective and quote Lloyd Bentsen as saying Dukakis "just didn't

believe those charges would stick" (p. 409). However, late in his campaign Dukakis finally followed his staff's advice that his "principled argument approach" had been a "prescription for defeat" which had given Bush a "license to hunt with negative tv ads without parallel self-defense." The Democrat buried his barely-audible-to-voters affirmative messages and began hammering on tragedies resulting from the Reagan-Bush furlough program for federal prisoners (Evans and Novak). Dukakis did surge slightly in the polls in the final two weeks of the campaign, but only because he borrowed a "page from the Bush book":

> Dukakis had used a basic ingredient of the formula that Bush had employed to put the election out of reach weeks earlier--a simplistic message that tugged at voters' emotions and did not tax their intellect. Bush's was that Dukakis was not 'in the mainstream of America' and Bush was. Dukakis' was that 'I'm on your side,' It was an appropriate end to the presidential campaign of 1988...a shallow appeal, tailored for the television sound bite, to an electorate that would not insist on something better (Germond and Witcover, pp. 455-6).

Ultimately, Dukakis chose sound-bite slogans over a "last chance to talk sense to the American people" (Shapiro,"Why It Was...", p. 19) and Campaign '88 concluded with an electorate and campaign critics disillusioned with both the process and the behavior of the campaign, regardless of party affiliation. Columnist Tom Wicker addresses this disillusionment when, in reference to Bush and Dukakis, he states "a plague on both their houses" (cited in Simon, p. 156).

The responsibility for the negativity of Campaign'88 and in part its lingering effect on post-election political behavior is perhaps more attributable to a systemized or systematic kind of demagoguery than the behavior of an individual candidate, media consultant or small group of advisors. What Nilsen identifies as "appeal beyond politics" persuasive political communication has produced the "growing business of merchanizing government" (p. 239). While selling or packaging a candidate is not new, some new twists in traditional parts of the American political system have produced a potentially lethal system capable of using the institutions of democracy to crush democracy (Kane, p. 4). Griffith argues such was the case with McCarthyism, which did not spring "alone and unaided" from the mind of

the junior senator from Wisconsin, but was instead symptomatic of the "malfunctioning of the entire political system" (p. 116).

Shapiro provides a framework for examining the "collective responsibility" for Campaign '88 and its negative legacy which includes what he calls the "Five P's of Poison Ivy Politics": the process, the polls, the press, the packagers and the public ("Why It Was...", p. 19). While the 1988 presidential campaign could be "indictment enough" of the way the nation chooses its presidential nominees, it is the two-party system which "magnifies the power of ideological true believers in both parties" that may be the greatest failing of the current system in Shapiro's view ("Why It Was...", p. 20). Karp also focuses on a party system geared toward privilege and elitism as a major contributor to the late 1980s American political climate. In this perspective the system is contaminated by a process involving Democrat and Republican leaders' joint oligarchic efforts to preserve their power bases through an "elective dictatorship" (p. 8). Since such a system would be threatened by a public voice in government, demagogic campaigning and leadership would serve as an effective smokescreen.

A major role polls played in contributing to Campaign '88 was their contribution to the "football-like ethos" that winning is the only thing that matters in politics (Shapiro,"Why It Was...", p. 20). Germond and Witcover refer to the "epidemic of opinion polls" sponsored by news organizations and a poll mania made particularly threatening by accompanying suspension of standards in judging the quality of the polls and what they really measured. Uncritical or questionable opinion surveys were frequently reported and, more seriously

> newspapers and broadcast outlets alike allowed their sponsorship of opinion polls to shape their own coverage....there is a difference between reporting on opinion-poll findings as an indicator of who's ahead, and allowing those poll findings to become the shaping element of the coverage (pp. 56-7).

Because the mass media links individuals with a campaign and provides the material that forms the basis for each individual's judgments, the press is essential to campaigning and the public (Anderson, p. 485). The press has become more of a participant in the political process because it has changed the rules about what is legitimate news. As of Campaign '88, the "character issue"--the private

lives of politicians--began to drive the news media more than any other (Germond and Witcover, p. 58).

Television in particular, because of "the short attention span that it fosters", is targeted by Shapiro as a "primary cause of the nation's political malaise" ("Why It Was...", p. 21). Andersen agrees that while print media continue to influence opinion leaders, it is television which profoundly alters how individuals are exposed to the news and so alters campaigns. The press plans how to cover campaigns while campaigns plan how to use the press and the "public feels left out of a process central to its ability to control its future" (p. 484). Rosenthal, while agreeing that Americans were manipulated into making up their minds "on the basis of material that intellectually almost reaches the level of the Saturday morning children's cartoons" , questions who or what in the political system is doing the manipulation. He asserts it is not the media, certainly not the "anchors and reporters of the tv evening news shows" who are only doing their job of covering the world in the half-hour allotted to them and doing it well for that limited amount of time ("The Manipulators").

Entman, in his book Democracy Without Citizens argues that the media system compels politicians to practice demagoguery. A dilemma exists in which to become sophisticated citizens, Americans would need high-quality, independent journalism; but to stay in business while producing such journalism, news organizations would need an audience of sophisticated citizens. This "vicious cycle" is the product of a process, of an interrelationship among the media, their messages, their elite news sources, and the mass audience (p. l0). Pressures from the political, economic and idea markets collide and create news that frustrates all and also

> provide an overwhelming temptation for politicians and other political figures to engage in demagoguery--a term that has gone out of fashion even as the practice has been virtually institutionalized. Other forces besides the media create incentives for political opportunism. But demagoguery does feed on the biases of the news for the simple and symbolic, for the appearance of power and popularity and against any sign of ineffectiveness or public disfavor (pp. 126-7).

Considering that the media may have found it impossible to track substantial issues in Campaign '88, they may have unintentionally contributed to demagogic rhetoric by encouraging Bush in his refusal

to address issues and focusing only on what his handlers gave them: slogans, unsubstantiated claims and sound-bites. Instead of demanding accountability and forcing the Republican team early in the campaign to re-align their agenda and deal with substantive issues, the media played into the negative agenda and contributed to the continuation rather than criticism of a demagogic campaign.

Certainly the "packagers" or "handlers" of Campaign '88 were responsible for much if not most of the actual behavior of their candidates. With campaign success resting more and more on the "bottom line" criterion of "doing what it takes to win", both parties eventually hit bottom. Shapiro reports that the differences between Republican and Democratic campaigns were "more those of competence than electoral philosophy" with the Dukakis efforts mostly "a case of handler envy" of the Bush team's excellent execution of a dirty job ("Why It Was..." p. 20). While both campaigns were packaged, Dukakis' failed. Bush's was successful, according to a post-election Gallop poll, essentially because of the "assault" on the Democrats spearheaded by Ailes and Atwater (cited in Germond and Witcover, p. 467).

Denton considers the professionalization of political communication over the last decade to be one of the most important developments in American politics. The new breed of political and media consultants, the professional politicians and the "king makers", now find themselves on permanent staffs of elected officials and "the link between electoral politics and campaigns, leaders and the public" (p. 6).

However, some argue that even the handlers are not wholely responsible for their creations. Broder cautions it's easy to blame the "hired gun consultants" for the damage, but to "remember who hired them" (p. 5A) and Rosenthal argues "they are getting paid to get their men elected, not teach a civics class" ("The Manipulators"). Referring to Atwater's alleged connection with the Foley memo, Ronald H. Brown, chair of the Democratic National Committee said:

> One staffer can't take the fall for an entire Republican political operation that's up to its knees in sewer-style politics. The President of the United States has got to get control over his low-life henchmen. You can't conduct yourself one way and then apologize for it the next day. You can't play good-cop, bad-cop forever (cited in Weinraub, p. BII).

Ultimately, presidential elections finally come down to the voters, to the quality and accuracy of the information they receive, to their ability and willingness to separate fact from fiction and attempt a rational judgment at the ballot box (Germond and Witcover, p. xvi). Apparently, not many wished to attempt such a judgment during Campaign '88. The percentage of eligible voters casting a ballot fell to below fifty percent, the lowest since 1924 (Germond and Witcover, p. xvi). Simon believes "as a people we have to do better" and that, while a candidate can win by being explicit on issues, "the public must demand it" (p. 67).

While both candidates lost voter respect as a result of Campaign '88, McDonald reports a more significant effect was the loss of respect of American voters for the democratic process (p.30). This loss of respect was communicated through apathy not only at the ballot box but through-out the campaign process. Rarely before has a campaign proceeded with virtually no public penalty or insistence on something better for such tactics as Atwater's attack-ads (Germond and Witcover, p. 422). Andersen notes there is a growing group in the American electorate who do not become active in a citizen/community role and who are not so much turned off as simply uninvolved or not interested (p. 484).

Such an apathetic or dis-interested electorate breeds demagoguery which "works on the inert, unattending mass" (Karp, 179). Public participation is vital for a working democracy. Without it, politicians have no guidelines from their constituents for executing campaigns and administrations. Windt identifies public opinion and support as the fundamental power in a democracy (p. 2); Potter argues the defense against government outrages aimed at private citizens is public opinion (p. 295) and Fisher observes demagoguery is rejected when the public becomes informed and acts on its knowledge (p. 269).

It may be that in the kind of political system represented by Campaign '88,the electorate is its own worst enemy. The process, the packagers, the polls and the press all may be held accountable in an open society to the public. However, a healthy system constricts, as in the case of Campaign '88, when the electorate exercises the option not to participate and speak up. Rosenthal believes Americans "manipulate ourselves" during political campaigns by showing "no outrage" at being treated "like

nincompoops every single day" ("The Manipulators") and in McDonald's view, election campaigning will continue to be characterized by negativity until voters decide to penalize those who use slash-and-burn rather than substantive issue-based strategies (p. 32). It seems demagogic communication thrives in a society failing to provide access to information and solicit the electorate's opinion. The more a public is cut off from information and participation, the more silent and apathetic it becomes. And the more the electorate becomes both prey and perpetuator of a demagogic system.

Conclusion

This essay has examined Republican campaign communication strategies during the 1988 presidential election as well as some of the effects of those strategies on political communication behavior during the first year of President Bush's administration. Since Campaign '88 was found by many to be one of the harshest races in American political history, this study attempted to define the role of Republicans in particular in that campaign. George Bush's campaign rhetoric is presented as demagogic and orchestrated by the Republican election team under Lee Atwater's direction. Atwater and his colleague Roger Ailes introduced negative campaigning early in the race, thus setting an attack agenda which resulted in Michael Dukakis remaining primarily on the defensive and George Bush's election.

Finally the essay suggests Campaign '88 and its legacy may have resulted from a demagogic system with parts including the process, the polls, the packagers, the press and the public. Essentially, as happened during the McCarthy period, the current American system seems to both perpetuate and require a "defense" of democracy through undemocratic methods (Caute, p. 53). Some point out that the Democrats having lost every presidential election since 1969--with the exception of Jimmy Carter's 1976 victory--lack a team of slick professionals with experience in winning (McDonald, p. 33). While full-blown demagoguery may not have been occurring in any of these elections, the focus on "lacking the skill to win" rather than concern with providing enough information to create an informed and active electorate is bothersome. Trent and Friedenberg address this issue with a rhetorical question:

> Can a nation be adequately governed by officials and advisors whose skills are those necessary for successful political campaigning? (p. 312).

This essay concludes with some suggestions for modifying the campaign system from one that encourages "winning" as the bottom-line criterion for a well-executed race to one that facilitates an educated and interested electorate. Fisher, for example, believes that in an increasingly complex political arena, voters must learn to depend more heavily on their leaders to offer options, on the news media to interpret those options and upon scholars to provide information to the press upon which interpretations can be made. Fisher addresses the systemic character of political behavior when he cautions that the failure of any one of these groups can result in an electorate unequipped to make a reasoned judgment (p. 144).

Rosenthal conceives of a "plan for a decent campaign, fast" focusing on those who "are the only ones who could take the bottom-line decision to say to hell with ratings for an hour or two a day until Election Day", television network executives. In this view, these executives would request their political specialists to work out a full political agenda of specific issues, news conferences and debates. By lot, one network at a time would run a selection from the menu daily until Election Day. If both candidates agree, "a campaign at last." If one refuses, the opponents would get an hour a day of prime tv time on at least one network and a prominently displayed empty chair would be a "daily reminder of political cowardice" ("The Manipulators").

Asserting US registration laws are among the most stringent in the world and demonstrably diminish voting, Entman argues for passing a federal law encouraging easy registration to increase voting and political interest and knowledge. Many politicians, he asserts, prefer to keep the electorate small and manageable. However, party organizations could gain from new voters and the media might gain larger audiences if more people cared about public affairs (p. 139).

Bailey and Jamieson believe that because negative attacks work they will probably continue to be a mainstay strategy in political rhetoric. Accordingly, they suggest four criteria to determine if negative campaigning is also substantive and accurate campaigning: are the charges true, relevant and fair and is their source clearly apparent? (Televised Interview).

Lastly, Shapiro simply argues that the only way presidential politics will "ever again rise to a higher plane" is if there is a real backlash from the American public against the type of campaign waged

in the 1988 presidential race ("Why It Was...", p. 21). And, again as during the McCarthy era, it's up to the American voter to determine whether or not such tactics will continue to work. Until this issue is settled one way or the other the habitual appearance of demagoguery in the form of elected officials, campaign handlers or the system itself seems likely.

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